

# "Fellowship (1)"

## INTRODUCTION

1. Fellowship is both an interesting and complex topic
2. Biblical fellowship is mentioned in several places throughout the NT
3. In today's lesson, we want to look at an overview of fellowship in the NT and note, in particular, *various aspects* of "**fellowship**" as we find the word used in Scripture.
4. This will not be an exhaustive study...but should serve to provide interest for more study and investigation of this important Bible topic.

## I. WE SHOULD USE BIBLE WORDS IN "BIBLE WAYS"

- A. We are taught to speak "as the oracles of God" (I Peter 4:11).
1. Certainly this is teaching that we must teach the gospel of Christ according to the "inspired utterances" (i.e. oracles of God) when we are teaching our brethren or the lost.
  2. Doesn't this also include the necessity to use *Bible words in the way in which they are used in the Bible* and not dilute or change them (thus *polluting* the actual meaning of our teaching)?
- B. Bible Aids like a Good Bible Dictionary Can Assist the Christian studying the Bible
1. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, is an example of a "Bible Aid" that defines words as they were used in the Old and New Testaments
  2. In the case of our English word, "fellowship", as used in the NT, we can look at Strong's #s 2842, 3352, 2844, 2841, and 4790 (*Vine's*, p. 233); *joint participation, sharing, communion*,

## II. LOOKING AT SOME PASSAGES ON THE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF WHAT GOD CALLS "FELLOWSHIP"

### A. Acts 2:42 – Brethren having fellowship when participating in spiritual activities pleasing to God

1. The apostles' doctrine is equivalent to the "doctrine of Christ" (2 John 9) and the "gospel of Christ" (Rom. 1:16)...the new covenant, the new law, the NT.
2. People today should follow the example of the early church and continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine in fellowship, in the breaking of bread (i.e. Lord's Supper) and in prayers
3. Is this the *only time* we can have fellowship with God is when the church meets for authorized activities? Let us look at other passages which give us some idea as to the scope and aspects of biblical fellowship.

### B. I John 1:3-10 – Brethren having fellowship with God and faithful saints by walking in the light

1. Is this idea of "fellowship" *important*? If so, we should be highly interested in it. If not, we should be studying something else that is more important.
2. Notice that *walking* in the light is *continuing* to live in what God determines is right....and *walking* in darkness is *continuing* to practice a lifestyle of sin, as determined by proper discernment of the gospel of Christ.
3. God will NOT have fellowship with *improper* worship, *unscriptural* practices or *any other sin* we engage in. For, there is *no darkness* in Him per this text!

### C. Philippians 1:5 & 4:15,16 – A church having fellowship with a preacher by sending monetary support

1. The church at Philippi had "*fellowship/shared*" with Paul by supporting him in the preaching of the gospel from the first up to and including the time that Paul wrote the book of Philippians (about 10 years or so).

2. The Macedonian call came to Paul (Acts 16:9), God providentially worked for things to work out that Paul traveled to Philippi (vss 11,12), most probably starting the church there with the conversion of Lydia and her household (vss. 13-15), the Philippian jailer, and possibly others on the occasion of the miracle that allowed Paul and Silas to be freed from prison (vss. 22-40), and the local church was established in Phillipi.

**D. Philippians 2:1 – The relationship of being in fellowship with like-minded brethren, even in other locations.**

1. In addition to the *monetary support* given to Paul in preaching the gospel (called "fellowship" in Philippians 1:5 & 4:15,16, the church at Philippi is said to be in a relationship of *fellowship* with Paul as they continued to obey the gospel of Christ (2:1).

**E. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 – The axiom that light has no communion with darkness, etc.**

1. This passage uses the term "*fellowship*" and a few synonyms in making a point about Christians keeping themselves free from entanglements of the world, particularly with non-Christians (in this context).

2. Christians are taught in this passage to NOT to get into relationships with unbelievers that constitute "unequal yokes" (or unequal *partnerships*) vs 14

3. God didn't have to give us "reasons", but note that He did

3. What *fellowship* has righteousness with lawlessness? NONE vs 14 (polar opposites)

- What *communion* has light with darkness? NONE vs 14

- What *accord* has Christ with Belial? NONE vs 15

- What *part* has a believer with an unbeliever? NONE vs 15

- What *agreement* has the temple of God with idols? NONE vs 16

4. The SOLUTION (if a Christian is *unequally yoked* with an unbeliever)...The child of God is to "come out from among them" and be SEPARATE per vs 17.

F. There are OTHER PASSAGES in the NT that teach about sin in the lives of Christians leading to broken fellowship with God and among/between brethren. In some cases, after efforts to bring the erring back (cf. *restore such a one* in the spirit of meekness per Gal. 6:1,2) sometimes "spiritual discipline" must take place and in conjunction with that....social interaction is withheld (cf. "with such a one no not to eat" (See I Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3:6-15). This is to keep the local church pure and lovingly restore the sinner.

**G. Philemon 1:6**

1. Philemon, a Christian, had a slave named Onesimus, who ran away to Paul (we don't have all the details) and was converted to Christ and Paul sent him back to Philemon with the letter by that name with instruction to Philemon that he was to receive Onesimus as a brother in Christ, forgiving him (for God has) and to put anything that is on Onesimus' account with Philemon in the way of owing him anything, to Paul's account (vss. 15-19).

2. The "*sharing of your faith*" (vs. 6) is speaking of ...*joint participation, working together* in a common goal of spiritual activity as prescribed by God, with love in our hearts and demonstrated in our actions.

**H. Hebrews 13:16**

1. ....do not forget to do good and to *share*....

2. can include the concept/idea of *communicating* a benefit to others in this sharing

3. this might be in the area of *benevolence* (according to God's pattern)

4. and...it might be in the form of supporting a preacher (local or otherwise) thus, *evangelism*

**I. I Corinthians 10:16,17 – Sharing in the observance of the Lord's Supper together (worship)**

1. ..the cup of blessing which we bless...is it not the *communion*...of the *blood* of Christ?

2. in the observance of the *Lord's Supper*, we *share* in the *participation together*....
3. the bread which we bless....is it not the *communion* ... of the *body* of Christ?
5. When we *commune* with God and faithful brethren in the scriptural observance of the Lord's Supper (per this passage particularly), as well as in other scriptural actions of worship, we are said to be involved in "*fellowship*" (communion, sharing, joint participation in, etc.).

#### J. 2 Corinthians 9:1-15 – A church sending funds to relieve needy saints (benevolence)

1. Note: this relates to the situation of *needy saints* and includes the instruction in I Corinthians 16:1-3
2. The collection was authorized "for the saints" (in Jerusalem, in this case) who were in need (vs. 1)
3. Paul taught the local churches in Galatia the same thing (i.e. for churches *that were able* to help needy saints worthy of relief in Jerusalem). This was "ministering to the saints" (2 Cor. 9:1) and "supplies the need of the saints (9:12).
4. See I Cor. 4:17 – Paul taught the *same thing* everywhere in every church in his preaching the "*whole counsel* of God" (See Acts 20:26-28) everywhere he went!
5. This type of "*fellowship*", known as *church benevolence* can occur today when churches (who are not in need) send funds from their treasuries to relieve needy Christians (until such need is met). 2 Cor. 8:10-15
6. While I Cor. 16:1,2 is the only passage that teaches how the local church is able to *raise* her funds (i.e. freewill offerings of money on the first day of the week into the treasury of the local church), it is NOT the only passage of Scripture in the Bible that teaches us how a local church may *spend* her funds (cf. evangelism, edification, limited benevolence, and worship – Acts 6:1-6; I Tim. 5:16; Phil. 4:15,16, etc.).

**NOTE:** The pattern of the NT instruction on *church benevolence* always involves the churches relieving needy *Christians*, thus excluding non-saints (See Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4:32,34-35; Acts 6:1-6; Acts 11:29,30; I Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8; Rom. 15:25-32; 2 Cor. 9:1-14; I Tim. 5:16b). There are even some Christians (see I Tim. 5:16) that God does not want the local church to be involved in relieving, when there are Christians instructed to do so (in this case family members who are in Christ and capable of doing the relief are to do so that the church is not taxed/burdened/charged with such). The pattern of the NT instruction on *church benevolence* always involves the churches relieving needy Christians, thus excluding non-saints (See Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4:32,34-35; Acts 6:1-6; Acts 11:29,30; I Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8; Rom. 15:25-32; 2 Cor. 9:1-14; I Tim. 5:16b). There are even some Christians (see I Tim. 5:16) that God does not want the local church to be involved in relieving (when there are Christians, in this case family members who are in Christ and capable of doing the relief within their own kin/family unit so that the church is not taxed/burdened/charged with such relief).

Separate and apart from *church benevolence*, the Bible teaches us about *individual benevolence*. We do well when we study, discern the appropriate differences and obey the instruction for both. James 1:27, Galatians 6:10, I Tim. 5:16a, and Ephesians 4:28 (along with other passages applicable *to the individual*) teach that *individual Christians* have a *benevolent* responsibility (separate and apart from the local church treasury funds) to include relief of *some* who are not Christians (i.e. non-saints).

"*Christians* have a 'benevolent' responsibility to both saints and sinners, but especially to Christians! *Churches* have a right to provide the needs of some saints, but not all – but not to alien sinners!" (Sutton, *The Simple Pattern*, p. 147)

There are distinct differences (and yet *some* similarities) in what the NT teaches *individuals can do with their funds* and what *the local church can do with her funds*. Let us be careful to always be sure that we are acting in accordance with God's Word, properly discerned, on passages involving *church work* and/or *individual work*, respectively.

### III. ENCOURAGEMENT (AGAIN) TO USE THE WORD "FELLOWSHIP" AS IT IS USED IN SCRIPTURE

A. We should not use the word "*fellowship*" differently than that found in Scripture (I Peter 4:11).

1. Let us NOT call activities "*fellowship*" that the Bible does not support calling fellowship:

- "After worship services at the church's building, we are going to have *fellowship* at the church gym."

- "After our 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Singing, we are going to have *fellowship* at the covered-dish luncheon in the church *fellowship* hall."

2. Also, it is of particular interest that the Bible never calls the scriptural actions of a Christian using his/her own funds to relieve the benevolent needs of a non-Christian "*fellowship*".

3. The Bible never calls churches or individuals getting together for social activities "*fellowship*".

4. Why *would* we? Why *should* we? (Col. 3:17).

B. **EXAMPLE:** Consider the term "*baptize*" as found in the Bible - How do we use it? How do others use it today in 2021? How is it used in the Word of God? *Does it matter* if we call sprinkling or pouring "baptism" (without any qualification or explanation whatsoever)?

1. Note a *huge difference* in the way in which the Bible uses the word in the new testament...and in the way that some take a *modern* English dictionary and cite/give a "*secondary meaning*" of baptism to include sprinkling and/or pouring in the definition of baptism.

2. Col. 2:12-14 and Rom. 6:1-4 teach us that *scriptural water baptism* is a "burial" in the likeness of Jesus' death, BURIAL, and resurrection as a person "puts on Christ" in becoming a child of God.

3. Man is not able to legislate, vote, decide, or otherwise *truly* change the *biblical meaning/definition* of terms (eg. "marriage", "baptism", "fellowship", etc.) in modern times from the meaning *God intended*.

### CONCLUSION

1. There is quite a bit more to the matter of fellowship & church and individual discipline!

2. We hope to add more study material in the future, Lord willing.

3. Please refer to the material in the Credits/Resources listing you may find helpful in your study.

4. May we keep our minds and Bibles open and may God bless us that we will continue to grow in proper discernment throughout our lives in spiritual matters to be well pleasing to God (Acts 17:10,11; Heb. 5:9-14 & Heb. 13:20,21).

**Thanks so much for considering the teachings in this lesson!** Please feel free to make comments, ask questions, or, if you would like to study the Bible free (by phone, or other methods), just contact:

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[www.religiousinstructor.com](http://www.religiousinstructor.com)

### Credits/Resources:

PowerPoint by Stephen Russell –Sermons/Charts entitled "*Devoted to Fellowship*" - 10/1/2017

[www.pepperroadchurch.org](http://www.pepperroadchurch.org)

Outline and PowerPoint by Kevin Kay (2018 Exploring Current Issues Conference)

Assigned topic: "*Fellowship: How Do We Decide?*" [www.eciconference.com](http://www.eciconference.com) Archive

*The Early Church* by Ferrell Jenkins

*Saving...A Study of Church Discipline* by Donnie V. Rader

*Pursuing the Pattern* – Edited by Jim Deason - (2017 Exploring Current Issues Conference)

*The Simple Pattern* – Edited by Jim Deason - (2012 Exploring Current Issues Conference)

*A Reply to Jim E. Waldron's "Is the Doctrine of Saints Only in Benevolence True"*

by Thang Guite & Mark J Ward (posting in the next few months at [www.religiousinstructor.info](http://www.religiousinstructor.info) in the "E-books and Articles" Section of that website)